

It's Not So Much The Deer But The Outing That Counts

By Monte Noelke

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Page 5

MARFA — This is written from a deer hunting camp in the Davis Mountain country. A fully armed troop of cavalrymen never packed as much firepower as occupants of the camps. Very early each morning the hunters pull out, loaded with enough arms and ammunition to take charge of nearly any college campus in the nation. Even the days of Pancho Villa's raids couldn't have produced so many gun-packing Americanos.

Hunting in these parts isn't like it is in our section of the Shortgrass Country. Level ground here is limited to about a dozen square feet around the saddle-house door. Any old pony that can't out-climb a tree ape is considered a counterfeit; and the roads, if you can find them, are tough going for front-wheel drive vehicles. One of those circus fellows who rides around on single-wheel bicycles would have a hard time keeping his balance here.

I notice that people are more generous in the mountains than they are in the flatlands. On the first morning of the hunt, the ranch manager loaned me his top mount to pack a deer off a rimrock. He was kind enough to go catch the mare after she'd thrown both deer and rider.

You can't beat that kind of hospitality anywhere in ranchdom. On a lot of outfits the boss would sleep on a wet bed before he'd put a stranger on one of his personal mounts. It's also well known that range captains aren't prone to go skinning across the countryside chasing loose horses for tourists.

Wild game abound on this ranch, Blacktail deer run in herds of eight or 10 to the bunch. Javelina hogs are common sights, scurrying through the mountain passes. Dove and quail, in abundance, wing up and down the canyons.

At breakfast today I thought I'd discovered of a new kind of possum or badger underneath the cook shack. But after more careful investigation it turned out to be a late-rising hunter sleeping on the front porch. Any other amateur naturalist would have sworn the muffled growling was coming from some sort of rare mountain varmint. I wouldn't be surprised if a lot of those abominable snowmen yarns are traceable to something just like that.

Southwest of our camp lies the most awesome spectacle of all. Chinati Peak rises 7000 feet to a panorama of snow-covered uncorrupted loveliness. Deer hunting is a mighty important thing on a trip like this, yet in the evenings, as the sun sets behind the peak and the peach colored clouds float around the majestic mountain, deerslaying seems awfully insignificant.

It's going to take a quart of liniment to get over my host's generosity with his pet horse. When I get back home, blabber mouths will have spread the news to the extent that there won't be any use trying to deny that my one-jump, sure-fall bronc riding reputation has followed me west.

Flat, soft ground is going to be sacred, once this hunt breaks up.